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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000405

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/FO (AMB MQUINN), SA/A, S/CR, SA/PAB, S/CT,  
EUR/RPM  
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG  
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN, KAMEND  
OSD FOR BREZINSKI  
CENTCOM FOR CG CFC-A, CG CJTF-76, POLAD  
REL NATO/AUST/NZ/ISAF

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958 N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: PRT/HELMAND HELMAND RELIGIOUS SCHOOL  
GROUNDBREAKING DRAWS HUGE CROWD

1.(SBU) SUMMARY: The January 23 groundbreaking for a PRT-supported madrassa (religious school) drew a huge and d enthusiastic crowd of over 600. Local radio, television, and print media covered the event. Most provincial directors as well as the Provincial Council (including three of four women members) attended the groundbreaking. Officials described the project as the most significant PRT project ever, dispelling ACM propaganda that the Coalition was trying to denigrate Islam. When complete, the school will have a capacity of 400 (200 boarding). It is administratively under the provincial education office and will teach secular assignments in addition to its focus on Islam. The school will provide an alternative to students attending extremist madrassas in Pakistan. END SUMMARY.

2.(SBU)RESPECTING ISLAM, BRINGING PROGRESSIVE CHANGE: Governor Daoud, in his first major public appearance, told the large crowd that education is light. The project proves that the Coalition respects Islam. Daoud said that the project will demonstrate that young people do not need eed to go to extremist madrassas in Pakistan. The new madrassa will not only provide an Islamic education, but students will receive a well-rounded education to include English, math and science. The Governor also used the occasion to denounce opium cultivation, noting how it goes against the principles of Islam.

3.(SBU)Mullah Ahmad, head of the Provincial Mullahs Council, said that he strongly supported the inclusion of secular subjects in the madrassas curriculum. He said that English is especially important in todays world. He added that the Mullahs Council greatly appreciated the PRTs assistance.

4.(SBU)The PRT Commander said that this project illustrated that the provincial government was engaged in projects that were bringing progressive change to Helmand. He urged the audience to support the Government, which would lead to more progress in Helmand.

5.(SBU)Separately, Provincial Council Deputy Chairman Haji Qurban Ali Urozgani told PRT POLOFF that the madrassa madrassa project is the single most important project the PRT has undertaken. Urozgani said that many citizens told him that the construction of the school has mitigated their fears concerning the Coalitions attitude towards Islam. In addition, people are very happy that their sons do not have to go to Pakistan for a religious education.

6.(SBU)COMMENT: While the project will raise the general education level in Helmand, it is hard to overestimate the goodwill that it has brought to the PRT and Coalition, especially in disproving ACM propaganda that the Coalition is trying to undermine Islam. The project also is likely to have a positive impact on Helmands security. One source of ACM activity in the southern region has been the radical madrassas in Pakistan. It is hoped that the Lashkar Gah madrassa will serve as a moderating influence, thus mitigating risk in the region. END COMMENT.

7.(U) Dushanbe minimize considered.

NORLAND

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